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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S REMARKS CALLING FOR FREE MEDIA, FAIR
ELECTIONS IN NEPAL
GARNER WIDE MEDIA ATTENTION

SUMMARY

1. Ambassador Moriarty made front-page headlines October 26 and 27 in a series of comments supporting free media and questioning the call by His Majesty's Government of Nepal (HMGN) for elections amidst a crackdown on the press and a continuing refusal by the government to reach out to the political parties. Just days after security forces' midnight raid on private Kantipur FM, the Ambassador visited the radio station on October 25 to see firsthand the gaping hole where satellite up-linking equipment had been seized by the government to prevent Kantipur from sending its signal to eastern Nepal to provide for simultaneous broadcasts. A day later the Ambassador met with journalists and made his first public comments about HMGN's recent call for municipal and national elections, warning they would be a "hollow exercise" if the government did not create the conditions for free and fair polls. END SUMMARY.

USG OUT IN FRONT ON SUPPORT FOR FREE MEDIA

2. On October 25, the Embassy released the text of a statement by Department Spokesperson Sean McCormack, who said the USG was "deeply disappointed and concerned by the shocking seizure at gunpoint of radio equipment from the Kathmandu office of Kantipur FM Station, an independent FM radio station, by state authorities on October 21." The same day Ambassador Moriarty visited Kantipur FM to see firsthand the hole where the up-linking equipment had been. During his visit the Ambassador noted, "Free media is a cornerstone of democracy; therefore, we are concerned and worried and my government is worried." News and photographs of the Ambassador's visit and the Spokesperson's statement was featured on popular Kantipur TV that evening and dominated the front pages of The Kathmandu Post (E/D, circ: 30,000), Kantipur Daily (V/D, circ: 100,000 plus), and other daily newspapers in both English and Nepali on October 26.

3. The Ambassador continued this show of support for free media and democracy at a program on October 26 with journalists in Butwal, a town in Rupandehi District in the Terai. In prepared remarks that highlighted recent successes for electoral democracy in Afghanistan and Iraq, Ambassador Moriarty said that in Nepal, elections without the robust participation of legitimate political parties would be a "hollow exercise." He again called on the Palace to reach out to the political parties to find a way back to democracy, saying: "Nepalis and the international community alike worry that the King is less interested in conducting free and fair elections than in elections intentionally designed to validate his continued rule." The Ambassador also called on the political parties to participate in elections if the King were to reach out and if the polls could be conducted freely and fairly. He then went on to question the Maoists' intentions during the ceasefire and urged caution by the political parties when they approached Maoists for talks.

4. The next day the Ambassador toured three FM stations in the neighboring city of Tansen and conducted an impromptu press conference, repeating the USG message about elections and media freedom. One radio station, which claims to broadcast into 20 of Nepal's 75 districts, aired his remarks that same morning, reaching thousands of Nepalis who do not get Kathmandu newspapers.

5. The Embassy released the Ambassador's October 26 comments to journalists in Butwal in both English and Nepali to media houses in Kathmandu for maximum exposure. All daily English and Nepali newspapers covered his remarks and his visit to Butwal and Tansen, most on their front page. The Ambassador's comments dominated local newspapers in Rupandehi District as well.

CONFUSION ON THE CHINA ISSUE

6. During the question and answer session in Butwal, journalists asked the Ambassador about recent news that China had offered military assistance to HMG and that the government was courting support from Pakistan and Russia. The Ambassador replied that while HMGN had a right to self-defense and to seek weapons from any legitimate supplier, he hoped that the King would not see such arms deals as a way to escape pressure from the international community, namely the West and India, to compromise

with the political parties and return to democracy. In that sense, the USG was watching the arms deal with great concern. The next day in pro-Indian newspapers The Himalayan Times (E/D, circ: 40,000) and The Annapurna Post (V/D, circ: 60,000), the Ambassador's comments were not wholly reported. The media said the USG "objected" to Chinese military aid but did not report his concern that such transactions would lead the King to ignore the need to reconcile with the political parties.

17. In comments in Rautahat District on October 30, Vice-Chairman of the Council of Ministers Dr. Tulsi Giri decried this so-called U.S. "objection" to Chinese military aid and went on to call President George W. Bush the world's worst human right violator and say that HMGN would never bow down to U.S. pressure.

ON THE SIDE OF THE ANGELS

18. COMMENT: The USG was one of the first in the international community to comment publicly on the Kantipur FM raid. Subsequently, The Kathmandu Post (sister paper of the station) placed the Ambassador's comments about free and fair elections above similar comments by the British Ambassador and the Prime Minister of India. Local journalists in Butwal also were extremely pleased to have such a candid interaction with the Ambassador, and one said: "Since 23 years I am associated with media and within this time period I have not found any ambassador or foreign diplomat had got such coverage in local, national and international media during his/her visit in this region." The Ambassador's domination of last week's headlines made clear USG support for democracy and civil liberties in Nepal.

MORIARTY